



Your Guide to **Getting a Colonoscopy**

About 1 in 20 Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in their lifetime. You can beat those odds.

Because colorectal cancer cases are on the rise among younger people, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the American Cancer Society recently changed their screening guidelines and lowered the age when screenings should begin.

Although there are several types of screening options, screening by colonoscopy is the best way to prevent colorectal cancer by finding and removing precancerous growths called polyps before they have a chance to turn into cancer.

Some people put off having a colonoscopy because of the pretest bowel preparation, and some may worry that the procedure will be unpleasant. This guide is designed to give you the information you need about colonoscopy. We will cover how the procedure is performed, how to prepare, and what you can expect. This guide also discusses who should get a colonoscopy, the risk factors for colorectal cancer, and possible symptoms.

Under the new recommendations, colorectal cancer screenings for those at average risk should begin at **age 45.**

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If you have questions or concerns about having a colonoscopy, please call the Cooper Digestive Health Institute at **856.536.1125**. We would be happy to arrange an office consultation with one of our healthcare providers.

About Colorectal Cancer

Colon cancer and rectal cancer are often grouped together and called colorectal cancer.

Colorectal cancers tend to grow slowly. They usually start as polyps, which are abnormal growths of tissue in the lining of the colon or in the rectum. If not removed, some polyps can turn into cancer over time. Although colorectal cancer may start within a polyp, most polyps do not contain cancer.

Risk Factors

Colorectal cancer affects both men and women and is most often found in people aged 45 or older. However, in recent years, the number of cases found in younger people has increased.

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In most cases, it's not clear what causes colorectal cancer, but there are certain factors that increase a person's risk. These factors include:

- Age 45 or older
- Family history of colon cancer, rectal cancer, or polyps
- Hereditary cancer syndromes, such as hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC), Lynch syndrome, or familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP)
- Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis)
- Polyps
- Obesity
- Lack of exercise
- Diet (eating a lot of red meat, processed meats, or meats cooked at very high heat)
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cigarette smoking
- Drinking too much alcohol

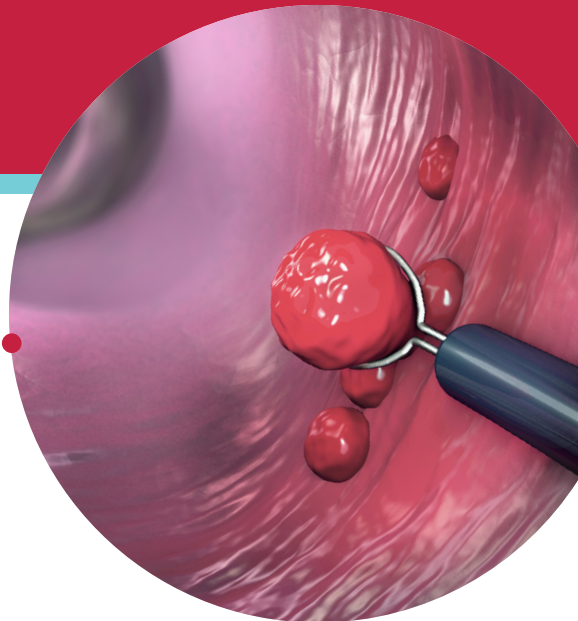
People who are at higher risk for colorectal cancer may need earlier or more frequent screening. Talk to your doctor about when to begin screening and how often you should be tested.

Symptoms of Colorectal Cancer

Colon cancer often has no symptoms in its early stages, but some symptoms may include:

- Rectal bleeding
- Blood in the stool or toilet after a bowel movement
- Diarrhea or constipation that does not go away
- A change in the size or shape of stool
- Discomfort or the urge to have a bowel movement
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Bloating or a full feeling
- Change in appetite
- Weight loss without dieting
- Fatigue

These symptoms may be caused by something other than cancer. **But if you notice one or more of them for more than two weeks, see your doctor.**



Screening Is the Key to Prevent or Catch Colorectal Cancer Early

Your greatest defense against colorectal cancer is to prevent it or catch it at its earliest, most treatable stages.

The early detection and removal of colon polyps through regular screening saves lives. A colonoscopy also allows doctors to identify colorectal cancers once they have developed. When these cancers are found at earlier stages, they have a higher chance of cure and better overall outcomes.

Although screening can be done with tests taken at home with stool samples (FIT test or Cologuard®, for example), colonoscopy is the gold standard for screening and provides definitive results. A doctor (gastroenterologist) performs a colonoscopy, checking for polyps or cancer inside the rectum and the entire colon. Any polyps found during a colonoscopy can be removed during the procedure, helping to prevent those polyps from possibly developing into cancer later.

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Who Should Get a Colonoscopy?

Most people should have a colonoscopy starting at **age 45**. You should get a colonoscopy every 10 years, or more frequently if recommended by your doctor.

You may start screening at an earlier age if you have a family history of colorectal cancer or other factors that increase your risk. Talk to your doctor about your risk factors.

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About the Procedure

The “Prep” for Your Colonoscopy

Your colon must be completely empty and clean to ensure that the doctor performing your colonoscopy can clearly see the walls of the colon during the procedure. This is called “bowel prep” and may begin a day or two before your scheduled colonoscopy. An appropriate and complete bowel prep is needed to allow your doctor to find and remove polyps or precancerous lesions during your procedure.

You will receive specific instructions from your doctor on exactly what you need to do to prepare for your colonoscopy. There are generally two aspects to bowel prep: adjusting your diet and taking prescribed laxatives in liquid or pill form to flush out your bowels.

A few days before your test, you may want to limit your consumption of high-fiber foods, such as salads, seeds/nuts, popcorn, and hard fruits and vegetables.

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The day before your colonoscopy, you may have clear liquids only and should aim to drink at least 8 oz of liquid each hour. Clear liquids include:

- Water
- Coffee
- Tea
- Sports drinks, such as Gatorade (except those that are red or purple)
- Soda
- Jell-O
- Popsicles
- Water ice
- Broth

The day before your colonoscopy, you will also take a prescribed laxative in liquid or pill form. There are several options available, and your doctor will discuss them with you. You will continue to drink clear liquids during colonoscopy prep to flush out your colon before your procedure. If, after your prep, your bowel movement is clear and yellow like urine, you have had a good bowel prep.

On the day of your colonoscopy, you can have clear fluids up until two hours before your procedure.



- **Scan this code** with your smartphone to watch a video outlining the steps involved in getting a colonoscopy and answering some of the most frequently asked questions about the procedure.



What to Expect on the Day of Your Colonoscopy

- ▶ **Colonoscopies are brief procedures,** lasting only about 30 minutes. They are performed in an outpatient endoscopy center. Before your procedure, you will change into a hospital gown.
- ▶ Before the doctor begins your colonoscopy, **you will be given an intravenous sedative** that will allow you to sleep during the procedure.
- ▶ **After you are sedated,** the doctor will insert a long, flexible tube called a colonoscope into the rectum and move it up through the colon. A small video camera at the tip of the tube gives the doctor a view of the inside of the entire colon. The colonoscope is equipped with tools that allow the doctor to remove polyps or obtain small tissue samples, if needed. Any polyps or tissue removed during the procedure will be evaluated by a pathologist to see if cancer is present.



About the Procedure

Recovering From Your Colonoscopy

After your colonoscopy is completed, you will rest in a recovery room until the sedative wears off. This recovery time may take up to an hour. You may still feel a bit groggy, so you will need to have someone available to take you home.

You may experience some mild side effects from your colonoscopy. These side effects result from the air that is pumped into your colon during the procedure and may include:

- Bloating
- Cramping
- Gas pains

You may notice traces of blood in your stool afterward if the doctor detected and removed any polyps during your procedure.

Colonoscopy is a safe medical procedure, and complications are extremely rare. However, you should contact your doctor immediately if you experience any of these side effects after your colonoscopy:

- Bleeding
- Bloody bowel movements
- Difficulty having a bowel movement
- Difficulty passing gas
- Fever
- Pain
- Dizziness
- Vomiting

Colonoscopy is a safe medical procedure, and complications are extremely rare.

Getting Your Results

Your doctor will tell you immediately after your colonoscopy whether any polyps were found and removed during the procedure. If polyps were found and removed, a pathologist will examine the tissues to determine whether they are cancerous or precancerous. It may take up to two weeks to receive the full results of your colonoscopy.

Colonoscopy results are classified as “negative” or “positive.”

- A **negative result** means that the doctor did not find any abnormalities during your colonoscopy.
- A **positive result** means that polyps or other abnormal tissues were found.

When Should You Have Your Next Colonoscopy?

▶ If you received a **negative result** from your colonoscopy, your doctor may recommend that you have your next procedure:

- **In 10 years** — if you are at average risk for colorectal cancer.
- **More frequently** — if you are at higher risk for colorectal cancer.

▶ If you received a **positive result**, your doctor will likely recommend more frequent screening to monitor your health. The frequency of repeat colonoscopy depends on the number and size of polyps removed during your procedure and any other risk factors that you have.

Your doctor may recommend another colonoscopy sooner if you had more than two polyps or if a polyp was large, showed cancer, or had certain characteristics that suggest that you have a higher risk of colorectal cancer.

Your doctor may also recommend an earlier repeat colonoscopy if there were any issues with or concerns about your procedure or your risk factors.

Fast Facts About Colorectal Cancer

Screening Saves Lives

If you are 45 or older, getting a colonoscopy could save your life.

Here's how:

- Colorectal cancer usually starts from polyps, or unusual growths, in the colon or rectum.
- Over time, some polyps can turn into cancer.
- Colonoscopy can find and remove polyps before they turn into cancer.
- Other screening tests, such as a FIT test and Cologuard®, can also help to find colorectal cancer early, increasing the chance of cure.

Start your
colorectal cancer
screening at age 45.

Call 856.536.1125 or
visit Cooperhealth.org/
screenings to make an
appointment.

Insurance Coverage

Colonoscopy screenings are covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most commercial health insurance plans for those who are age 45 and older.

Colonoscopy is usually covered for those at any age if their doctor recommends screening because of a family history of colorectal cancer or other risk factors.

If you don't have insurance, we can help. Free colorectal cancer screenings are available. Call 856.968.7308 for more information.

About

1 in 20

Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in their lifetime.

Colorectal cancer
is the

third most common

type of cancer in
the United States.

Colorectal cancer affects
men and women about
equally.

Colorectal cancer occurs
more frequently in
African Americans.

The incidence of colorectal
cancer has decreased
since the mid-1980s as
a result of better
screening, but it is
**increasing in
younger adults.**

The most
important factor
in survival after
colorectal cancer is
**the stage
of the cancer**
when diagnosed.



Why Choose Cooper University Health Care for Your Colonoscopy?

Cooper gastroenterology experts offer advanced colorectal cancer screening and diagnosis. All colonoscopies are performed at our advanced endoscopy centers and that have been accredited by the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy for meeting the highest standards for quality of care and safety.

All of our gastroenterologists are members of the MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper team.

The Cooper Digestive Health Institute provides you with outstanding care that offers unique advantages, including:

- **Nationally recognized physician experts.** Our physicians offer a level of experience and clinical excellence in gastroenterology that is unmatched in South Jersey.
- **Nurses and support staff who are specially trained in gastroenterology care.**
- **State-of-the-art endoscopy centers with advanced technology.**
- **Attention to both general and complex problems.** Our physicians approach each patient's individual needs, whether general or complex, with the same attention to detail.

**Schedule
your
colonoscopy
today.**

Colonoscopy screenings are available at our Digestive Health Institute locations in **Camden**, **Mount Laurel**, and **Willingboro**.

You can conveniently schedule your colonoscopy with just a referral from your primary care doctor.

Call **856.536.1125** or visit **Cooperhealth.org/screenings**

